The Anatomy of Melancholy in Book I of the *Faerie Queene*

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In his treatise on melancholy, the celebrated physician André Du Laurens described how the disease was generated through the preoccupations of the imaginative faculty of the soul: "This sillie man is led captive of love, and religious deuotion preuaileth with another. This humour then will imprint in melancholike men the objects most answerable to their condition of life and ordinarie actions."¹ Hence, the various states of melancholy were named according to the objects that caused them: love melancholy, religious melancholy. But this is not to suggest that the list of objects and their melancholy correlatives could be greatly extended, for in terms of the actual treatises of that age dealing with the condition, there were essentially two kinds: those that dealt with the pathogenetic elements of amorous desire, and those that dealt with the pathogenetic elements of the religious quest. No other human endeavour concentrated the passions or imprinted its conditions upon the soul as did these two. Moreover, the nucleus of received medical ideas that accounted for the somatopsychic processes governing these conditions provided the grounds for their association in the Tudor mind – and if not at the level of medical causes, then at the level of mythopoetic association. In accordance with the habits of Renaissance logic, those causes that share a common effect must, in themselves, be related through their attributes at the level of correspondences. By Burton's time, the association was widely recognized, at least by those he approved: "but some do not obscurely make a distinct species of it, dividing Love-Melancholy into that whose object is women; and into the other, whose object is God."² They are in essence one and the same phenomenon, differing in few respects in the way they transfix the soul and thereby generate that deteriorating complicity of depraved judgement and adust humours that leads, in turn, to common ends: moroseness, despair and suicide.

Behind each sub-species was a distinct literary and mythological tradition. Together they constitute a preponderant portion of the quintessential in Tudor literature. The lover, as viewed in the medical treatise, exhibits all

the symptoms that a nearly exhausted Petrarchan tradition could provide by way of torment, sleeplessness, loss of appetite, sighing, tears and weeping. Behind those manifestations of complaint and suffering – the result of fixing the eyes upon an object of beauty that first enthalls, then tyrannizes over concupiscent appetites as well as over the nobler elements of the soul – there was a psychology of self-accusation, a culturally conditioned paralysis in the face of the devotional object, and a ritual diminishing of self-esteem. By contrast, the religious melancholiac was victim of a peculiarly Protestant brand of self-achievement, dominated by metaphors of the militant Christian life, by incrementally demanding trials of continence and purity of conscience, and by meticulous elaborations upon the psychomachia. The Pauline armour of faith was superimposed on the mythic structures of chivalric adventure redeployed as the sequence of spiritual trials that either confirm religious joy or demonstrate its loss. By raising the woman of flesh and blood to the level of a religious symbol, and by adopting the exploits of Medieval knights to symbols of the militant Christian life, the Tudor poets furnished themselves with objects of devotion also capable of leading to despair. Each assumes its place in a common ideological and poetic ethos.

Nowhere are those associations more clearly exemplified than in Book I of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, for in creating the narrative by which the Redcrosse knight is brought from his nearly fatal despondency to a reconfirmed state of constancy in the Christian life, Spenser devises a compound essay on the traditions relating to melancholy. Given the intense examination of the soul that arose with the Lutheran principle of the priesthood of every believer and the Calvinist doctrine of election, the threat of despair became an integral part of the Reformation psyche – a threat predicated on the paradox that despair was both a serious failure of faith and hence a sin, yet a prerequisite to salvation that leads first through the valley of the shadow of death. Spenser prepares his Everyman characterologically with a brooding melancholy sufficient to make his lapses of the spiritual will an appropriate issue of his make-up. As the narrative proceeds, however, he also gathers up those allusions to erotic melancholy and to disease that complete the idea cluster, creating of this episode a psychologem of the human spiritual condition in the Renaissance, and an astute representation of the ideological elements that characterized and, by suggestion, conditioned Tudor religious experience.

The encounter with Despaire, as a narrative structure, was part of a well-established dramatic mode: a dialogue between the soul and an ogreish

projection of its own sense of fear, guilt and unworthiness. The subtle arguments and half-truths whereby Despaire works on the tender conscience were literary commonplace; the theological precepts concerning guilt and damnation were readily appreciated for their psychodramatic potential. That dramatic heritage can be traced to the Tudor moralities in which an Everyman figure either confronts a despair figure and is rescued by an agent of hope and mercy, as in Skelton's *Magnificence* or in Wapull's *The Tide Tarieth No Man*, or in which the protagonist is lost through despair and suicide, as in Nathaniel Wood's *The Conflict of Conscience*.³ That Spenser used these plays both generally and specifically is beyond doubt, including such details as the rusty knife and the halter, both going back to Skelton.

Spenser's innovation was in superimposing upon this theatrical mode the errant knight of the chivalric romance, and in preparing the hero psychologically by equipping him with a morose and melancholy temperament. We are informed early in the poem that Redcrosse is a man whose "cheere did seem too solemne sad" (I.1.2. 8).⁴ He fights an inconclusive battle with Sans Joy in canto v; he is pulled out of the *oubliette* of Orgoglio's castle in canto viii with "sad dull eyes deepe sunck in hollow pits" (I.viii.41. 1), and he is still being counselled in canto x to cherish himself better and "consuming thought/ To put away out of his carefull breast." (I.x.29. 5-6).

In the Redcrosse Knight Spenser represents religious melancholy in a way that avoids all reference to the controversy raised by Timothy Bright concerning the freedom of the will and the threats to that freedom by the physiological components of disease, presumably satisfied that moral deliberation is perhaps conditioned, but certainly not determined, by the body. Bright, a physician who turned divine, put himself to considerable trouble in *A Treatise of Melancholie* to distinguish between those dejections attributable to natural causes and those exclusively to supernatural ones.⁵ Clearly it was an intolerable proposition for a clergyman that the quickening of conscience leading to religious experience was but a by-product of the humours; by definition, religious despair must remain a product of the unencumbered soul. William Perkins likewise took up the issue in his *The Whole Treatise of the Cases of Conscience Distinguished into Three Books*.⁶ But as Noel Brann concludes, "the very intensity of this campaign by some of the age's leading theologians betrays a popular trend on the other side of the question to explain the phenomenon of religious despondency in terms of bodily disorder."⁷ The controversy can be traced to the continent where such writers as Ferrand defended the physician's role in the treatment of

diseases of the soul in accordance with the Galenic doctrine of sympathies that allowed the curing of psychological states through ministrations to the body. Robert Burton creates the grounds for compromise by going back to the disposition itself as a first cause: "much melancholy is without affliction of conscience as Bright and Perkins illustrate by four reasons; and yet melancholy alone may be sometimes a sufficient cause of this terror of conscience."⁸ Bright himself conceded that such despair could cause all the symptoms of true melancholy, and that the man of natural melancholy temperament was more inclined than any other to suffer spiritual anxiety and depression. Spenser, in any case, would have sided with the commonplace views of the age. In the light of current popular medical theories, it was understood that despair belonged to melancholy, and that a predisposition to such melancholy was a prerequisite to a tortured conscience. The force of Spenser's psychodrama creates a unity out of quasi-Calvinistic perturbations concerning election, God's ire, and guilt for sin on the one side, and quasi-medical perturbations relating to melancholy, moroseness and a paralysis of the will on the other, by making melancholy stand to despair as efficient cause to effect.

Spenser's portrait of the Christian knight progresses through subtle gradations that reflect a variety of informing dimensions of intellectual history. Redcrosse does not sink directly into anxiety over guilt and damnation without passing first through phases of spiritual listlessness and torpor – themselves the by-products of the arduousness of the devout religious life. This lassitude of spirit, this flagging of concentration would haunt him right up to the moment of his spiritual reconditioning by Dame Caelia. Janet Spens, many years ago, recognized Redcrosse's chief temptation as a form of *acedia*.⁹ The Anchorites who first gave shape to the idea declared it one of the most troublesome stumbling blocks to the attainment of spiritual goals. Though able to overcome all outward temptations, they were yet beset by the indolence of their own wills, for spirituality was for them, above all, a sense of joy that came only through mental continence and a disciplining of the will to live its own uninterrupted life of holiness. That fundamental desire to possess the divine essence – verified only through a confirming sense of joy – was condemned to compromises inflicted by the erring habits of the mind, and by the psyche's own perverse will to suffer. The unfinished battle with Sans Joy that leads Redcrosse to the vortex is, in its essence, an allegorized exemplum of this sin.

The common bond between the Anchorite troubled by acedia and the Protestant saint beset by despair can be identified both historically and structurally. The historical connection is not through any association of the practitioners themselves, but in the evolution of the idea. This territory has been covered by a number of well-informed observers and needs only brief comment here.¹⁰ The acedia of the Middle Ages that St. Thomas Aquinas defined as a sense of joylessness in the face of spiritual good had, as early as Petrarch's *Secretum*, undergone a secularization that deprived it of its specific spiritual application and made of it something very close to *Weltschmerz*.¹¹ That process allowed for the full development of a tendency to explain profound grief in the terms of medical philosophy. Galen's controversial "That the Faculties of the Soul Follow the Temperaments of the Body" was well-known to Medieval thinkers, but with the general rise in prestige and influence of Galenic medicine in the sixteenth century came a correspondingly wider claim by physicians that the passions of the soul belonged to the sphere of medical authority in a clinical sense. What was recognized as acedia and a condition of the spirit was described as a form of melancholy and a condition created through the sympathy between the body and the soul. It was melancholy that in turn captured the popular imagination, and it was in these terms that the Tudors would describe religious torpor, translated into the self-manifesting components of the zealous Christian life as expressed by the reformers. Acedia was metamorphosed into new terms, allowing for Siegfried Wenzel's claim that certain seventeenth-century writers continued to look upon acedia as the "medieval forerunner of what they called 'melancholy.'" ¹²

In structural terms, the Protestant saint shared with the Anchorite a bias of mind, a desire to focus the psychic energy entirely upon spiritual goals, a teleological fixation this side of mysticism that becomes the barometer for measuring religious achievements and religious failure. "Sebastian Frank saw the central characteristic of the type of religion when he saw the significance of the Reformation in the fact that now every Christian had to be a monk all his life."¹³ Max Weber points out how such concentration in western monasticism was meant to free men from their irrational impulses, from the world and from nature. The rules of the orders were designed to bring all actions under "constant self-control with a careful consideration of their ethical actions. . . . This active self-control, which formed the end of the *exertitia* of St. Ignatius and of the rational monastic virtues everywhere, was also the most important practical ideal of Puritanism."¹⁴ Spenser's

protagonist must assume a personal responsibility for his own state of grace and for the management of an inner spiritual life that was constantly tested, first by his incapacity to know joy, and second by doubts concerning the efficacy of grace.

The key to understanding Spenser's presentation of despair is in his encyclopedic habits of mind that worked at combining received ideas through mythic and narrative structures. The mechanisms of melancholy provided the glue whereby he could associate acedia with despair, and both with a state of disease – exemplified in the Christian commonplace of the sin-sick soul. Finally, most surprising of all, it allows Spenser to superimpose frustrated amorous desire upon religious despair as an entirely complementary component. Such interrelatedness at the level of ideas provides the rationale for the several parallel episodes of despair. In this procedure Spenser mirrors a conflation of medical and theological ideas that had been endorsed by the age.

Timothy Bright, even with his intent to separate sacred and secular concerns involving melancholy, conflates distinctions at the level of figurative language, in perceiving the sinner tempted by Satan as the patient, and the counsellor as the physician qualified to treat diseases both of the body and of the soul.

You are under the disadvantage of the melancholicke complexion, whose opportunity Sathan embraceth to urge all terror against you to the fall. But remember that he who hath redeemed us, passed under these feares and hath sanctified them to his redeemed, and according to his example, who was heard in that which he feared, when in the dayes of his flesh he did offer up prayers and supplications with strong crying and teares unto him that was able to save him from death: so follow him in hope and patience, who hath obtained the victory not for himselfe onely, but for all such as in like temptation depend upon him.¹⁵

Melancholy was, for Bright, the most singular of all Christ's temptations; the Saviour himself was beset by the noble but destructive humour which He conquered through prayers and supplications, providing an example for all to follow. Melancholy is both a tool of Satan to make men fall, and a complexion leading men into disease. This single quotation contains in résumé the spiritual wasteland stricken by disease and in search of a healer, the conqueror who, as the Great Physician, heals this sickness through a redemptive exploit, the inner landscape of the melancholy mind and its

relationship to hope, and the promise of victory through patience and prayers. What the physician as philosopher could not assert directly about the role of the humours in conditioning the soul to despair, the poet could assert by a metaphor reaching back to the earliest days of Christianity.

Spenser comes to the direct encounter between Despaire and Redcrosse in canto ix, where the wily Sophist gains the advantage over an indifferent and lethargic hero. Here, in keeping with the dramatic tradition, a rescuing figure quickly intercedes and sermonizes the victim to his senses. Canto ix belongs to the rhetorical tradition of the psychomachia and exploits the failures of judgement and cognition in dealing with the rationalizing elements that lead to dejection. But Spenser does not complete his essay in this canto, for Redcrosse persists in his morose brooding, rescued but unhealed. Only through the development of the language of disease could Spenser complete the dramatization of his idea.

In canto x the concept of disease and its cure comes into full force. The motif was seldom far below the surface, however, for sickness is at the basis of the myth of the wasteland; the sin that ravages the land as a dragon was, in effect, that same sin that must be dealt with in the hero of despondent disposition. Holiness must first endure the purgings and bleedings appropriate to the melancholiac, a regimen for psychic health that would, according to common belief, serve to diminish his brooding by reducing the material causes of the malady. The modern reader is inclined to read this episode in entirely figurative terms. The distinction in Spenser's age between the figurative and the literal was far less pronounced. In spite of disagreements concerning the influence of the humours and complexions upon the soul, and hence the freedom of the will, the idea of a close causal sympathy between the body and the soul nevertheless remained among the generally received ideas.

Spenser would not forsake the narrative potential in this association of ideas. Patience the leech is called upon as one who has "great insight/ In that disease of grieved conscience" (I.x.23. 7-8). The "soule-diseasd knight" is examined and prescribed a full complement of "Salues and med'cines," as well as powerful words of counsel. The purgatives are administered to free him from festering and rankling sin, and a diet is prescribed to "tame his stubborne malady." Spenser seems almost to take a perverse delight in the tortures of extreme medical practices, but remains by his metaphor in order to show the sometimes long and ruthless process required to rout out recalcitrant sin. There are daily beatings with an "yron whip," the bleeding

of sharp remorse, the bathing of open sores in a salt water bath, and the plucking away of superfluous flesh with "pincers first whot" accompanied by his shrieking and groaning.

Through such an arduous process Redcrosse finds a cure for his disease of the soul. The ambiguity of the allegorical method allows Spenser to escape the ambiguity of the Galenic premise implicit in the episode, that the diseases of the soul may be treated in the theatre of the body because they are caused not only by the judgement and the will, but also by the humours. By such logic, the treatment of those disorders must always be inconclusive since the foundational complexions giving rise to the disease may not be altered. In that sense, Redcrosse's victory must be a continuing battle against those determining physiological factors both as a man prone to melancholy and as a man born into sin. Spenser underscores in canto x, not reminders of God's mercy as before, but the necessity for patience and time that alone can see the patient through such fits of depression. In stanza 29 Una welcomes with a kiss her knight now cured of his morbid conscience, yet continues with her admonition "Himselfe to chearish, and consuming thought/ To put away out of his carefull brest," (I.x.29. 4-5) as though unconvinced of the permanence of the cure. Spenser could not linger to debate the efficacy of "trew Repentance" in the light of the temperaments of the body, but the episode confirms that he clearly thinks in terms of the temperaments as contributing to the conditions of the soul.

By definition, melancholy is a disease of desire, excessive desire, whether for a worthy or an unworthy object. Jacques Ferrand describes love as an intense desire for a perceived good, or an object of beauty, "and being not able to compasse our desires, this we call Griefe, and Despaire."¹⁶ Both spiritual and amorous desires provide the psychic energies that drive the narrative parts into place; they underlie the great design of Book I. Northrop Frye defined those desires in terms of the "theme of cynosure or centripetal gaze . . . addressed to mistress, friend, or deity. . . ." It forms "the central episodic theme of the high mimetic," and is at the very centre of the encyclopedic poem.¹⁷ This gaze is fulfilled by a union with the beauty it seeks, the imagery of which can be transformed back and forth between sacred and secular objects. Hence Spenser does not take the full measure of religious despair without exploring the lady as the object of desire, and without conflating the Petrarchan and chivalric objects with the objects of the spiritual life. Just as Anchorite and militant Protestant saint share a common religious heritage paralleled by the nature of their respective religious

endeavours, so the Christian Everyman, the knight pledged to *frauendienst*, and the lover of melancholy disposition share a single psychosomatic experience.

That common territory is generated out of the imperfect relationship between Redcrosse and Una as spiritual lovers, and out of the Sir Terwin episode that serves as preamble to the encounter with Despaire in canto ix. The former relationship has been too frequently commented upon to bear extensive examination here. There is nothing to be gained by a process of deallegorization, since clearly we are to read the courtship in an anagogical way. Paralleling the motif of disease, the wasteland, the sickness of the soul and the rites of expiation and purgation is the motif of marriage, the mystical union of the soul with Christ and of Christ with His church. Yet the dramatization of that courtship necessitates that the motivating gaze of desire animating the encyclopedic poem includes not only the Christ of the comedy of salvation, but also the archetypal lady of the comedy of marriage. The despair canto plays concertedly upon these two motifs almost simultaneously. The wiles and snares that test the hero serve not only as spiritual temptations, but as part of an initiation into marriage. For the marriage motif, despite its symbolic significance, must also function at the level of the romance narrative. In outline, Redcrosse and Una experience a troublesome engagement that leads them through a maze of errors and trials, bringing them predictably to reconciliation, to victory over their enemies, and to union. To be sure, it is a kind of *trompe l'oeil* romance since we must continually temper the sensual with an overlay of ideology. Yet we are entitled to speak of the emotions of desire that Redcrosse feels for Una, for the despair he experiences in canto ix includes the guilt he acknowledges for having betrayed his lady. Redcrosse is not, like Sir Terwin, rejected in love and therefore overwhelmed by a sense of futility and loss. Rather he nearly perishes in his own masochistic recriminations, even with Una recovered, forgiving and by his side. Melancholy is for him a state of low self-esteem in relation to the object of desire. Despaire, as a projection of one of the options of his own cognitive faculty, dwells on his infidelity.

Is not enough, that to this Ladie milde
 Thou falsed hast thy faith with periurie,
 And sold thy selfe to serve *Duessa* vilde,
 With whom in all abuse thou hast thy selfe defilde?
 (I.ix.46. 6-9)

The courtship motif with its conditions for melancholy is part of the same group of ideas that includes acedia, the theological anxieties over the certainty of grace and the worthiness of the sinner in the face of God's righteous wrath. The encyclopedic method proffers insights into a half-submerged but vital cluster of psychic associations: that the lover's torments know their full measure only by analogy with the sufferings of the soul, and conversely, that the sense of divine rejection can be expressed best in terms of the abandoned lover. Given this nucleus of ideas, it is no surprise that the next generation of lyric poets would attempt to reduce the sacred-secular motifs into a paradoxical vision violently forced together at the level of images.

More surprising is Spenser's invention of a preliminary episode in which the motif of the rejected lover, in the frank and open terms of erotic melancholy, is made to stand in bald juxtaposition with the temptation of the Redcrosse knight. Redcrosse is, after all, drawn to the Cave of Despaire initially in order to avenge the death of a fellow knight self-slain in the cause of love. That death hovers between the poetic and the real, between the social risks of hazarding all for love of a lady and the literal risks to life posed by *erotomania* as described by the physicians. Sir Terwin finds himself rebuffed by the lady to whom he had pledged his service. It is a co-ordinate example of that investment of desire and self-identity in another being that, unrequited, can release neurotic reactions more powerful than the survival instinct itself. No other conclusion can be drawn but that Spenser recognized the synonymous nature of these respective threats to life at the level of the medical and philosophical idea that alone justifies the juxtaposition of episodes.

Regarding such love as a disease of melancholy depression there was an abundance of literature, especially by the French physicians close to the medical faculty in Montpellier – François Valleriole, André Du Laurens, Jean Aubery, Jean de Veyries – who wrote on the clinical aspects of love in keeping with a tradition of medical thought that had existed in western medicine since the twelfth century.¹⁸ The passions of love could take hold of those inclined to the diseases of melancholy; they could corrupt the entire organism producing first sleeplessness, loss of appetite, hollow eyes, followed by a loss of a sense of reality, pathological lethargy or frenzy and finally despondency and death. Jacques Ferrand wrote in his encyclopedic treatise on love and its cures that it was "the most frequent, and most dangerous Disease that both sexes are subject to."¹⁹ In terms of contemporary thought, Sir Terwin was both a commonplace victim of unrequited love, and a diseased man

who could lose his life in a desperate turn of psychic events originating in an *idée fixe* that produces chronic depression and suicide. Katherine Koller misses the significance of this association of episodes in claiming that the Sir Terwin-Trevisan part serves merely as an ironic prelude, stating that "the irony lies, of course, in the trivial cause of the knight's despondence. A lady has disdained his love" and calling Shakespeare's Rosalind to her witness that no one ever died for love.²⁰ The thrust of Renaissance intellectual history testifies to the contrary; Spenser builds on those received ideas.

Sir Terwin was a knight well-advanced in all his affairs, a courageous man and noble, but like Redcrosse he was possessed of predisposition for melancholy. In love he was,

. . . not so happie as mote happie bee:
 He lov'd as was his lot, a Ladie gent,
 That him againe loued in the least degree:
 For she was proud, and of too high intent,
 And ioyd to see her louer languish and lament.
 (I.ix.275-9)

Despaire surprised him in the middle of his journey. A moment's reflection on unrequited love and he was undone, overcome by a sense of total hopelessness, together with his friend Trevisan. They divided the knife and the halter between them, Sir Terwin slaying himself, Trevisan fleeing in a frenzy, the halter around his neck.

Redcrosse seeks Depaire to call him to account for the slain lover. By imperceptible degrees, however, Depaire searches out those weaknesses and tender vulnerabilities in him that can make him succumb as well to the pseudo-logic of wanhope. The transition is made from love to devotion, and from devotion to spiritual anxiety. Death is presented as an escape for those who live in misery and doubt. Depaire adds to the list the disadvantages of long life, how all is a cheat, how accumulated sins distance one even more from God. Then he turns upon Redcrosse as a man of "luckless adventures" inciting those introspective accusations that create a longing for oblivion. It is an argument derived not so much from the vanity of all things as from the uncertainty of all things. To love and to desire intensely and absolutely is to invite catastrophes of the soul. To seek God with purity of heart is to seek an inner experience of God's grace confirmed in joy. But the lover, like the spiritual seeker, is attracted rather to states of elation based on ambiguous signs of approbation and reciprocation in a way that encourages

doubt, a will to suffer and to deny the self or to persecute the self when the object of desire is withdrawn or perceived to be lost. The saint fixes his gaze on a divine being whose favour appears enigmatic or inscrutable because its verification depends entirely upon the joy felt within, that is in turn dependent upon the whims of the devotee's own moods and temperament. Auto-suggestive joylessness may be the very essence of the fallen imagination.

In sum, according to this juxtaposing of ideas, the psyches of the spiritual lover and the introspective Protestant pilgrim share an identical psychology since both focused upon intangible objects that could be apprehended only in states of emotion. It is another way of expressing that search for internal manifestations of external grace so fundamental to Reformation thought. The lover, like the saint, pledged his entire being to maintaining a continence of feeling towards the object of his desire. Perceived rejection by the object of spiritual or amorous contemplation was tantamount to the death of the soul, producing an anguish silenced only by death itself. The age of melancholy recognized that such spiritual ventures, whether for the love of the lady or for God (often conflated in poetic imagery) were extremely dangerous because the mind was so inclined to turn against its own prosperity. This cluster of associations was a fundamental one in Tudor thought.

Spenser's melancholy knight is a manifestation of that malaise of thought in which all spiritual exploits worthy of a man's efforts were viewed as part of the structure of disease. Spenser's narrative is a record of the difficult process whereby, alone, the spiritual venturer can hope to extricate himself, not only from the disease that is sin but from the cultural neurosis that is love, and attendant melancholy habits of mind, since he saw them as complementary parts of a single condition. Yet in that same process there is hope, because the mind has resilientcies of its own, countervoices, instincts for survival that can, in time, be alerted. With right counsel, and the proper religious exercises, the individual can be led back to spiritual healthy-mindedness.

For the desert saints, acedia was rarely a terminal condition, but rather the low point in a revolving cycle of spiritual feelings, passing from elation to despondency. Acedia was thus a paradoxical state since it was both the nadir of the inner life, yet the state that often preceded mystical experience. St. Evagrius of Pontus (b. 345) commented upon this dual nature in his *Of the Eight Capital Sins*. In the dialectics of salvation, a true sense of one's own

depravity and unworthiness is the prerequisite to spiritual regeneration. The psychology of despair becomes an integral part of the doctrine of redemption. Spenser, like most of the morality and interlude writers before him, does not allow his hero to perish, but sees him through to his salvation (though the death of Sir Terwin reminds of the real dangers involved). At the same time, along the journey towards redemption, Spenser, in keeping with that dramatic tradition, spares his protagonist no misery that can thrust him back into the path of righteousness and of joy. Thus despair, though of necessity an act of sin and a dangerous disease, can also serve as the crisis that propels man back to God. The soul that knows its own depths alone can sense the full joys of grace. Bright urged his patient to adopt this positive view of his condition: that it was but an exercise of spiritual courage, and that one should not account "these small venies of Sathan for deadly wounds, which are nothing else but practices, and exercises of your spiritual courage, and circumspection; and introductions to the use of the whole armour of God..."²¹ Una is the requisite guide who provides the right views of duty and hope that will break the morbid fixations of the depressed mind. With such guidance, the dangerous examination of conscience becomes the *via negativa* whereby man may be saved. In so profiling this pivotal experience, Spenser speaks for a national religious temperament as he perceived it, and for a religious truth that had become central to Christian thought.

William James' study *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, remains one of the classic statements on this poetic idea. He examined the sick soul and recognized the psychological dimensions of that religious condition. In Bunyan's autobiography he saw the religious melancholy of a man with a psychopathic temperament,

sensitive of conscience to a diseased degree, beset by doubts, fears, and insistent ideas, and a victim of verbal automatisms, both motor and sensory. These were usually texts of Scripture which, sometimes damnatory and sometimes favorable, would come in a half-hallucinatory form as if they were voices, and fasten on his mind and buffet it between them like a shuttle-cock. Added to this were a fearful melancholy, self-contempt and despair.²²

James saw these extreme cases as on a continuum with more normal lives: "the normal process of life contains moments as bad as any of those which insane melancholy is filled with."²³ Yet James states that "the securest way to the rapturous sorts of happiness of which the twice-born make report has as an historic matter of fact been through a . . . radical pessimism . . ."²⁴ To avert one's attention from evil is to refuse "a genuine portion of reality," a reality that alone may open "our eyes to the deepest levels of truth."²⁵ Spenser, in illustrating the same general concept, creates a hero capable of such a positive reaction to his own pessimistic and melancholy nature. Redcrosse is neither pathologically melancholy and beyond all response to the good, nor the man of obdurate reason who intellectually refuses divine truth. Prone to melancholy, he yet can respond to the voice of his guide and endure the torments of the sick soul, thereby illustrating a view of Christianity as a religion of deliverance.

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Notes

- 1 André Du Laurens, "Of the diseases of Melancholie and the means to cure them," *A Discourse of the Preservation of the Sight: of Melancholike Diseases; of Rheumes, and of Old Age*, tr. Richard Surphlet (London, 1599), 98.
- 2 Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Floyd Dell and Paul Jordan-Smith (New York: Tudor Publishing Co., 1927), Part. 3, Sect. 4, Memb. 1, Sub. 1; p. 867.
- 3 *The Complete Poems of John Skelton* (London and Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1931, 1948), 236-7. For the texts of Wapull and Woods see *English Morality Plays and Moral Interludes*, ed. Edgar T. Schell and J.D. Shuchter (New York: Holt Rinehart & Winston Inc., 1969).
- 4 These quotations and those to follow have been taken from *The Works of Edmund Spenser, A Variorum Edition*, Vol. I. *The Faerie Queene Book One*, ed. Frederick Morgan Padelford (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1932).
- 5 Timothy Bright, *A Treatise of Melancholie* (London, by Thomas Vautrollier dwelling in the Black-Friers, 1586), 193 ff.
- 6 William Perkins, *Works*, 3 Vols. (London, 1608-31).
- 7 Noel Brann, "The Problem of Distinguishing Religious Guilt from Religious Melancholy in the English Renaissance," *Journal of the Rocky Mountain Medieval & Renaissance Association*, Vol. 1 (1980), 69.
- 8 Burton, Part. 3, Sect. 4, Memb. 2, Sub. 3; 939.
- 9 Janet Spens, *Spenser's "Faerie Queene"* (London, 1934), 130.
- 10 The most specific treatment of this topic is an article by Susan Snyder, "The Left Hand of God: Despair in Medieval and Renaissance Tradition," *Studies in the Renaissance*, Vol. xii, (1965), 18-59, but there are several important background studies to despair and related intellectual history including Reinhard Kuhn, *The Demon of Noontide: Ennui in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976) (*The Faerie Queene* is mentioned only in a note), and Siegfried Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960).

- 11 "Accordingly, since *acedia*, as we understand it here, denotes sorrow for spiritual good, it is evil on two counts, both in itself and in point of its effect. Consequently it is a sin, for by sin we mean an evil moment of the appetite. . . ." Saint Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, tr. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Chicago, 1952 rpr.), Vol. II, 563. Petrarch's *Secretum* is in the form of a devotional work that should, by convention, lead to a self-examination, contrition and renewal, but does not, because Petrarch is interested in seeing pathological grief as the dominant trait of the human condition in matters secular even more than sacred. It is a confessional work that uses the idea of *tristitia* to deal with a sense of personal defeat, a peculiarly "modern" work the actual influence of which is still is very much under debate among scholars. See the edition ed. E. Carrara, in *Francesco Petrarca, Prose*, ed. G. Martellotti et al. (Milan, "La letteratura italiana. Storia e teste," No. 7, 1955).
- 12 Wenzel, 186.
- 13 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, tr. Talcott Parsons (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 121.
- 14 Weber, 118-9.
- 15 Bright, 192.
- 16 Jacques Ferrand, *Erotomania or a Treatise Discoursing of the Essence, Causes, Symptomes, Prognosticks, and Cure of Love or Erotoque Melancholy*, tr. Edmund Chilmead (Oxford, L. Lichfield, 1640), p. a5^r.
- 17 Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (New York: Athanenum, 1957, 1967), 58.
- 18 Francis Valleriolae (b. Montpellier, practiced in Arles, taught in Torino), *Observationum Medicinalium, lib. VI*. (Lugduni, apud Antonium Candidum, 1588), esp. Bk. II, Obs. vii, 184-219; André Du Laurens (dean of the faculty in Montpellier till 1592), see note 1; Jean Aubery (studied in Montpellier during the time of Du Laurens, practiced in Paris), *L'antidote d'amour* (Paris, chez Claude Chappelet, 1599), Jean de Veyries (studied in Montpellier, practiced in Bordeaux), *La Genealogie de l'amour* (Paris, chez Abel l'Angelier, 1609).
- 19 Ferrand, "To the Reader," p. a3^r.
- 20 Katherine Koller, "Art, Rhetoric, and Holy Dying in the *Faerie Queene* with Special Reference to the Despair Canto," *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 61 (1964), 134.
- 21 Bright, 230.
- 22 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: New American Library of World Literature Inc., rpr. 1958), 133.
- 23 James, 138.
- 24 James, 124.
- 25 James, 138.